*Gemini*

**About the author : Sonya Mukherjee**

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**(**image taken from author’s website)

* Studied English and creative writing at Stanford and San Francisco State University
* *Gemini* is her first novel
* Her website: <https://sonyamukherjee.com/conjoined-twins/>

**Summary of book**

Hailey and Clara are pygopagus-conjoined twins who live in Bear Pass, a small rural town. Their mother strategically chose that location to shield them away from the rest of the world. In that small town, everyone knows everyone. So when there is news that a new guy is coming to their school, everyone freaks out. Will he be cute? Will he join the basketball team? Hailey is excited but Clara does not think Hailey should get her hopes up, has she *looked* at herself?! It turns out the new guy (Max) is not Hailey’s type but Clara is curious about him. Hailey’s eyes are set on Alek, a mysterious artist. With college around the corner, they begin to ponder if perhaps they can leave their small town and venture out into the world. Will Hailey be bold enough to apply to art school in San Francisco or will she stay to make Clara feel safe and comfortable?



(pygopagus conjoined twins / image of from ScienceDirect.com)

**Quotes:**

Clara: “when I was thirteen and still prone to crying spells, my mother liked to show off her so-called wisdom by telling me that every teenage girl sometimes feels like a freak of nature. She claimed that every adolescent worries that everyone’s staring at her, and every girl at some point has believed that no one likes her and that she’ll never belong..” (p 1)

I chose this quote because when I was a teenage girl, I felt like this. It is true, we feel like everyone stares at us or will notice that one pimple or scar. If we go through a bad breakup, we feel like it’s the end of the world! This is the type of quote that makes you want to keep reading because you are thinking “yes I *get* that!”. The quote also gives a peek of the type of mother they have, one who teaches them that they are not alone and that they are not the only girls who feel that way. At the same time, their mother overlooks the fact that Clara and Hailey will have a harder time understanding this because they are conjoined, so she can say all these positive things but it does not mean they will believe everything.

Hailey: “what was she getting at? That our parents should have had us separated as babies? That was a useless argument, and seventeen years later, it was certainly a moot one. No twins our age now, or anywhere near it, had ever been separated and lived to tell the tale..” (p 61).

Although Hailey is the twin that takes risks, risking her life or Clara’s to be separated from each other, is not worth it. She grew up as a conjoined twin and her whole life has been set up to accommodate their needs (at home and in school) that not being a part of her sister, seems wild. They would no longer be close because they are literally stuck to one another. The part of “unbreakable” love is also important because they share the same bodies so their love for each other is more tangible. This “unbreakable” love is also something siblings share, which many readers will be able to understand.

Hailey: “Do you know how exhausting it is to be so worried about so many things, for so long? All the things that could happen to them. Even now..” (pg 195). I chose this quote because it gives the perspective of the parents and how they feel about Hailey and Clara potentially moving away for college. Sometimes parents are scared of letting their children go to college in a different city/state/country, so they make excuses for them to stay close by. Although it is painful to let go of teens, it is important to give them that *choice*. Moving away from their parents gives teens a chance to figure out who they are, how to be independent, and teaches them valuable lessons. I think going off to college or staying nearby is something that teens will eventually have to deal with. Seeing how Hailey and Clara’s parents deal with it, might give them some ideas.

**In Classroom**

For a middle school or high school class, I would use this book for a unit on gender, sexuality and, the body. The main characters in the book are not completely able-bodied, so it is important to discuss the issues that people with health conditions/impairments face on an everyday basis. I would also use the book to talk about the disabilities that we *cannot* see, which are just as important to discuss. I will also use the book to consider what *language* we use to address people who are not able-bodied.

Although the book is easy to read, the content is more suitable for middle schoolers or high schoolers. Teens should read this book because they will get a glimpse of the struggles of conjoined twins which is something most people do not have to think about. For those that have a sister or brother that is close in age, it will be relatable. It will also be relatable for high school students (college applications, Sadie Hawkins dance, etc). For a writing assignment, I would ask students if they were conjoined, would they want to be separated from their twin or stay together like Clara and Hailey? The categories that this book fits into are: chapter 4: books about real-life experiences, chapter 6: books about identity, discrimination, and struggles with decisions, and chapter 7: books about courage and survival.

**Text complexity - Dale-Chall readability**

Raw score: 2.0094

Adjusted score: 3.6365 + 2.0094

Final score: 5.6

Readability index: grade levels 5 - 6

Recommended age level: 12 +